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May 25, 1939

It's Canning Time Again

JUN 13 1939 ☆
Department of Agriculture

A radio interview between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, May 25, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 104 associate radio stations.

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JOHN BAKER:

Here's Ruth Van Deman again--bringing you another pocketful of news from the Bureau of Home Economics.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

A pocketful? I hope I can find the pocket.

BAKER:

There's one in your kitchen apron.

VAN DEMAN:

My kitchen apron?

BAKER:

Didn't you say you're canning today--string beans, and green peas, and all kinds of vegetables?

VAN DEMAN:

I did--I mean I am.

BAKER:

Won't you need an apron?

VAN DEMAN:

I certainly will.

BAKER:

I'm sure it will have a pocket--a pocket big enough to accommodate Farmers' Bulletin 1762--"Home Canning of Fruits, Vegetables, and Meats"? No wise woman cans without that bulletin.

VAN DEMAN:

John, this is marvelous--proceed with the broadcast.

BAKER:

No, this is where I stop. I know my limitations.

VAN DEMAN:

I'd say you know your references.

BAKER:

When in doubt, consult authority--I do know that. And, Ruth, you've drilled it into us that it's wiser to can by a reliable timetable than to waste a lot of good garden "sass".

(over)

VAN DEMAN:

I didn't realize my words had sunk so deep.

BAKER:

Deeper than you think, probably. Maybe you didn't see that card from one of our Farm and Home friends. Knowing you were going to talk about canning today I brought it along.

VAN DEMAN:

As a testimonial?

BAKER:

That's all right. Close your ears if it's embarrassing. I'm going to read this letter from a listener in New Jersey:

"About eight years ago you advised me to buy a pressure canner. Well, I felt that I could never afford it. Every year I lost dozens of cans. In 1937 I lost 100 quarts of the finest hybrid sweet corn which was worth 40 cents a quart; \$40.00 in corn alone. So I purchased a steam pressure outfit and have not lost one can of anything since.--Do tell all the other dumbbells like me to wake up and stop hard work with the water bath on vegetables."

VAN DEMAN:

She doesn't need to be so hard on herself. I realize that it takes a little time for people to see the scientific why of a new way.

On this canning though, the Bureau of Home Economics does take a very decided stand.

We recommend the steam pressure canner as the one and only way to process peas, beans, asparagus, corn--all the non-acid vegetables. Because it's the only practical way to get the high temperature that's needed to sterilize them--to kill off the bacteria that are likely to develop and make the food spoil.

It's always bad enough to have food spoil and waste. But sometimes there's a kind of spoilage in home canned vegetables and meats that's very dangerous to health. The botulinus bacteria form a toxin.

So ever since Dr. Louise Stanley's been chief of the Bureau of Home Economics--and that's since 1933--all of the Bureau's directions for canning non-acid vegetables and meats have called for the steam pressure canner.

And by the way, if you're going to do much canning with your steam pressure outfit this summer, be sure the pressure gauge is registering accurately. That's most important. Now and then the pressure gauge may get temperamental--just like any other piece of delicately adjusted equipment.

And unless the gauge is working properly, you don't know what the temperature is inside the canner. And unless you have the right temperature in the canner, the food in the cans may not get hot enough to kill the bacteria that make the food spoil.

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BAKER:

That sounds like a vicious circle.

VAN DEMAN:

It is. A vicious circle when the gauge doesn't work, and a perfect circle when it does.

Some of the home demonstration agents, in the Extension Service, are helping the women in their counties to check on their pressure canners. Some of them have a master gauge to test with, right there on the spot.

The other way is to send the top of the canner back to the factory. That's a bother. But after all if it means the difference between a lot of fine sound canned vegetables on the pantry shelf next winter, and spoiled food that you have to take out and burn, then it's worth the bother.

BAKER:

About this steam pressure outfit, I want to get it clear. Is that the apparatus to can everything in?

VAN DEMAN:

No. The high temperature you get by holding steam under pressure,--240 and 250 degrees Fahrenheit,--that's too hot for fruits and tomatoes. It overcooks them,--spoils their color and flavor. And besides these juicy foods with a lot of natural acid in them, don't need that high temperature to make them keep.

All you need to do to them is to surround them by boiling water--put them in a boiling water bath that comes up over the top of the jars--and keep them there for for as long as the timetable says.

The temperature of the boiling water--212 degrees at sea level--will sterilize them sufficiently.

As I said, fruits and tomatoes are juicy. The heat from the boiling water penetrates them rapidly. And they're acid. It's easier to kill bacteria in acid foods than it is in ones that are starchy or have lots of protein in them.

Well, John, I know this isn't beginning to answer all the canning questions for everybody.

BAKER:

No, I expect it would be pretty hard to do that in one session.

VAN DEMAN:

I'm not sure I could do it in fifty sessions. Somebody'd be sure to have a question about every food that can be canned. Just for fun I counted the list in our bulletin the other day.

BAKER:

How many foods can be canned--at home? I'm curious to know myself.

VAN DEMAN:

Fifty-seven.

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BAKER:

Fifty-seven varieties!

VAN DEMAN:

Just a coincidence. The list for fruits starts with apples and apricots and runs down through strawberries and tomatoes.

BAKER:

Tomatoes are a fruit then.

VAN DEMAN:

For purposes of canning. And the vegetables begin with asparagus and end with sweetpotatoes. Then there are the meats from beef down the alphabet.

BAKER:

Well, before snow flies and it's time to can beef, we'll expect you back with more tips on canning the summer fruits and vegetables.

And now is it all right for me to offer formally the canning bulletin to our listeners?

VAN DEMAN:

I don't know anyone who can quote number and title better than you.

BAKER:

Thank you for the compliment. And now Farm and Home friends, (ad lib offer of F. B. 1762 - "Home Canning of Fruits, Vegetables, and Meats.")

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